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Bathing Beach Investigation and Outbreak Control
Questions and Answers

Visiting beaches and swimming in beach water are common summertime activities in Maine. If beach goers and swimmers take proper steps to keep themselves and others safe and healthy at the beach, they can assist in preventing illnesses sometimes acquired in beach settings. Illness can include food borne and waterborne diseases such as salmonella, E.coli and shigella. In some people like young children and older individuals, these illnesses can cause serious disease. For information on how to keep your beach safe, please visit the following web site:
<http://www.state.me.us/dep/blwq/beach.htm>

The purpose of this document is to provide information about investigations and outbreak control activities due to waterborne diseases acquired at beaches. Although no two investigations and outbreaks are the same, this sheet contains basic information and guiding principles used in most investigations and outbreaks. If you have any additional questions or would like further clarification, please contact the Maine Bureau of Health at 1-800-821-5821.

What do I do if I see people getting sick at my beach or have patrons telling me that they or their children got sick after visiting my facility?

If you notice that a number of people visiting and/or swimming at your beach are getting sick, call the Maine Bureau of Health at 1-800-821-5821. Likewise, if a patron reports that they or their children got ill after visiting and/or swimming at your beach, have them call the Maine Bureau of Health. Reports of illness can be due to undercooked or spoiled food, contaminated water or a virus present in the community. When the Maine Bureau of Health receives calls about people getting ill at a beach, they assess the situation and may begin an investigation.

If there is an investigation, who conducts it?

- The Maine Bureau of Health, Division of Disease Control coordinates the investigation and communication among all people and agencies involved in the investigation.
- The Maine Bureau of Health, Division of Health Engineering coordinates inspections of the facility.
- The Department of Environmental Protection may assist with the investigation and inspection and offer recommendations.

- If it is a state beach, the Department of Conservation is informed of the situation and will be involved in the investigation.

What happens during an investigation?

- The Bureau of Health will attempt to interview as many people as possible who were at the beach at the time of the outbreak. They will be interviewed about their health and exposures in order to determine a common source for illness, if any.
- If beach water is suspected as a source for illness, samples from the water will be taken and tested.
- The facility may be inspected.

What can a beach facility do during an investigation?

- The facility may be asked to take water samples and send them for testing.
- The facility (private, state or municipal) personnel may need to handle inquiries from the public and post advisories.
- If you are a state park, you will need to contact your Regional Manager.

What could be the outcomes of an investigation?

Based on the information gathered from the interviews, the inspections and testing of the water:

- Nothing may happen as a result of an investigation.
- Swimming areas may be posted explaining risks of getting ill from swimming.
- Recommend swimming area should be closed.
- Recommend swimming area should be reopened.

What should I say if the media contacts me?

The Maine Bureau of Health can offer recommendations and educational tips relevant to the situation that may help when talking with the media. You may want to determine ahead of time the person from your facility who will talk with the media.